

Unhappiness in Retirement: “Isho” of Suzuki Bokushi (1770-1842), a Rural Elite Commoner

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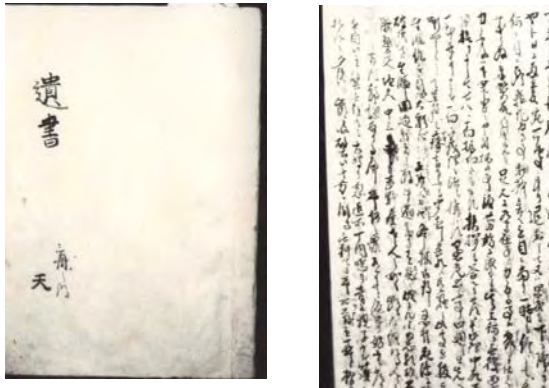


FIGURE 1: “Isho” written by Suzuki Bokushi in 1839. Cover page (left) and first page (right) of the first volume “Ten.” Courtesy of Minoru Takahashi (photographed 1983).

Introduction

Standard images of early modern life in Japan suggest that individuals in Tokugawa society were subordinated to the group, especially the *ie* (house, household). However, as suggested in works such as those by Herman Ooms, Anne Walthall and Edward E. Pratt, individual relationships within groups were far more complex and sticky than such stereotypes indicate.¹ The dominant image stems partly from

¹ Herman Ooms, *Tokugawa Village Practice: Class, Status, Power, Law* (Berkeley: University California Press, 1996) reveals tensions within the village structure, while Anne Walthall, *The Weak Body of a Useless Woman: Matsuo Taseko and the Meiji Restoration* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998) provides an insight into women’s participation in intellectual circles. In addition, class tensions between the wealthy farmer-merchants and peasants in rural areas are discussed in Edward E. Pratt, *Japan’s Protoindustrial Elite: The Economic*

the nature of the documentation left for historians to explore, a record that, unlike European writing of the same era, typically leaves out personal reflections and detail.² There are, however, rare documents that show us just how complex relationships could be between individuals and the groups to which they belonged. The final testament (“Isho”) of Suzuki Bokushi (1770-1842) (see Figure 1) shows us this dynamic in a particularly compelling way.³

Bokushi (real name, Gisōji) is now best known as the author (or co-author with Santō Kyōzan, 1770?-1858) of *Hokuetsu seppu* (North-Etsu snow album), an ethnographic account of his native snow country of Echigo.⁴ He was a figure of the early modern rural elite or *gōnō*, actively engaged in commercial activities, local politics, and artistic pursuits.⁵ Despite his justifiable pride in his own

Foundation of the Gōnō (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 1999).

² See, for example, Harold Bolitho, *Bereavement and Consolation: Testimonies from Tokugawa Japan* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 10, 27-29.

³ Bokushi’s “Isho” is available in a modern printed format in Miya Eiji, Inoue Keiryū and Takahashi Minoru, comps., *Suzuki Bokushi zenshū* (2 vols., hereafter SBZ1 and SBZ2), vol. 1 (Tokyo: Chūō Kōronsha, 1983), 885-961. Several studies in Japanese have examined “Isho”, including: Takahashi Minoru, “Isho ni miru bannen no Bokushi zō (originally published in 1974),” in Takahashi Minoru, *Zayū no Suzuki Bokushi* (Sanjō, Niigata: Nojima Shuppan, 2003), 116-40; Takada Hiroshi, “Sekaiichi nagai yuigon o kaita otoko no urami no jinsei,” *Shinchō* 45+ (June 1985): 70-81; Isobe Sadaji, *Suzuki Bokushi no shōgai* (Sanjō, Niigata: Nojima Shuppan, 1997), 125-26; Ujiie Mikito, *Edojin no oi* (Tokyo: PHP Kenkyūjo, 2001), 29-71.

⁴ *Hokuetsu seppu* is most widely read in a paperback version from Iwanami Bunko: Suzuki Bokushi with Santō Kyōzan, *Hokuetsu seppu* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1978, first edition 1936). An English translation is available: Suzuki Bokushi, *Snow Country Tales: Life in the Other Japan*, translated by Jeffrey Hunter with Rose Lesser (New York: Weatherhill, 1986).

⁵ Many studies have discussed Bokushi’s life from various perspectives. Comprehensive works

achievements in these areas, Bokushi was unhappy in the last years of his life. He began his “Isho”, written in 1839, with a complaint directed at his son-in-law, recalling an unpleasant incident in the recent past:

Late in the first month this year, when I said just a little about family business as I always do, you dared to tell me “If you come out and try to help us, you just make trouble in our business (*tosei no samatage*).” Since I had a stroke, I have always been in the upstairs part of the house. I don’t do any more than a half or a third of what I want to do for my family. ... I can do some jobs on my own if they are just in front of me. If I can’t do something, I tell our servants to do it. The reason is that I can’t leave anything undone once I have noticed it. But you call all my help of this kind just “trouble making”! And you don’t even turn around to look at me seven or eight times out of ten when I talk to you about some necessary thing. You even ignore my greetings!⁶

“Isho” is full of such raw emotions, and thus it vividly exposes the existence of tensions and conflict between Bokushi and other members of his family. The text was unedited, carelessly written, added to bit by bit over a period of half a year, presumably

include, in Japanese, Takahashi Minoru, *Hokuetsu seppu no shisō* (Niigata: Koshi Shobō, 1981); Isobe, *Suzuki Bokushi no Shōgai*; and, in English, Anne Walthall, “Introduction: The Life and Times of Suzuki Bokushi,” in Suzuki Bokushi, *Snow Country Tales*, xxxi-li; Takeshi Moriyama, “Crossing Boundaries: Suzuki Bokushi (1770-1842) and the Rural Elite of Tokugawa Japan,” (unpublished PhD thesis, Murdoch University, 2008). Recent studies of *gōnō* families include, Pratt, *Japan’s Proto-industrial Elite*; Brian Platt, *Burning and Building: Schooling and State Formation in Japan, 1750-1890* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2004), 66-99; Gail Lee Bernstein, *Isami’s House: Three Centuries of a Japanese Family* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 25-35, 53-65.

⁶ “Isho,” 887.

when something came to Bokushi’s mind.⁷ The result is a rare record of the real voice of an elderly commoner in the Tokugawa period.

Bokushi’s “Isho” is very different from what we normally conceive of as the will of a dying person in modern times. The length of the document is extraordinary: it consists of a massive number of words, around 66,000 *ji*, contained in 142 pages of three volumes of hand-made notebooks.⁸ Presumably this was one of the longest final testaments produced by a Japanese person prior to the modern age or possibly in all of Japanese history.⁹ Also astonishing are the contents of the document. Unlike a normal will from the modern day, it contains few notes about family assets and property, but a great many personal comments, expressed in a mixture of recollections of Bokushi’s life, advice on the family business and, very conspicuously, complaints against his son-in-law, then the head of the Suzuki family. As I discuss below, these features relating to length and content are probably largely due to the author’s idiosyncrasies, especially his particular abilities, his physical disability, and the emotions he was feeling at that time: he was fond of writing, but hard of hearing, found speech difficult, and he was isolated from other family members.

Focusing on this document, the present essay takes part in an ongoing debate on the interaction between the *ie* and its members in early modern Japan. The Tokugawa period is often regarded as the time when “*ie* society” became established in Japan. Scholars have highlighted political and cultural mechanisms within the *ie* that enabled it to function as “the matrix of each individual’s subordination to the collective,” in areas such as village administration, family registration and marriage.¹⁰ Studies suggest that commoners’ growing acceptance of the notion of the *ie* is evident in the spread of such practices as building family graves and establishing

⁷ “Kaidai,” SBZ2, 418.

⁸ See Takahashi, “Isho ni miru bannen no Bokushi zō,” 119.

⁹ Bokushi’s “Isho” has been considered as “the world’s longest will” in Takada, “Sekaiichi nagai yuigon.”

¹⁰ See, for example, Patrick Beillevoire, “Japan: a Household Society,” in *A History of the Family*, vol. 1, edited by André Burguière, et al. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996), 523-565. Quote from 541.

house names (*kamei*, *yagō*) often together with specific family businesses (*kagyō*).¹¹ On top of those practices, many members of the rural elite tried to reinforce the value of their *ie* by producing family documents including family trees (*kakeizu*), lists of family precepts (*kakun*) and house chronicles (*nen-daiki*), which had earlier been the preserve of aristocrats, samurai and wealthy merchants in the cities.¹² Focus on these practices together with Confucian principles such as filial piety and ancestor-worship promotes the impression that *ie* norms were assuming increasing authority over the individual lives of family members in Tokugawa society.

On the other hand, scholars have also identified examples of people's resistance to *ie*-centered norms, and instances of deviant behavior, in events such as divorces, illicit affairs, and engagement in intellectual pursuits or political movements.¹³

¹¹ See, for example, Sasaki Junnosuke, *Edojidairon* (Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 2005), 277-300; Ōtō Osamu, "Shōkeiei, ie, kyōdōtai," in *Nihon shi kōza, Volume Six: Kinsei shakai ron*, edited by Rekishigaku Kenkyūkai and Nihon Shi Kenkyūkai (Tokyo: Tōkyō Daigaku Shuppankai, 2005), 1-16.

¹² *Kakunshū*, a collection of Japanese house codes compiled by Yamamoto Shinkō (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 2001), provides good evidence of the spread of the notion of the *ie* from aristocrats, to daimyo families, to wealthy urban merchants, to provincial merchants and farmers.

¹³ For example, in English, Anne Walthall, *The Weak Body of a Useless Woman*, and Bettina Gramlich-Oka, *Thinking Like a Man: Tadano Makuzu (1763-1825)* (Leiden: Brill, 2006) provides good examples of women's intellectual pursuit far beyond the normal expectation given to housewives in those days. Laurence E. Marceau, *Takebe Ayatari: A Bunjin Bohemian in Early Modern Japan* (Ann Arbor: Center for Japanese Studies, The University of Michigan, 2004) shows a samurai poet's flight from home possibly after his illicit affairs with his sister-in-law. In Japanese, a number of cases of divorce initiated by wives' departures are revealed in Takagi Tadashi, *Mikudarihan: Edo no rikon to joseitachi* (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1987) and Ōtō Osamu, "Fūfugenka, rikon to sonraku shakai," in *Kinsei Nihon no seikatsu bunka to chiiki shakai*, edited by Watanabe Nobuo (Tokyo: Kawade Shobō Shinsha, 1995), 177-206. Iwabuchi Ryōji,

These examples do suggest that relations between the *ie* and individuals in the Tokugawa period could be more complicated than is usually imagined, but the available evidence is so far scattered and limited, in a sign of the general scarcity of 'private' views in Tokugawa-era documents. Moreover, the majority of family documents consist of a single voice, offering no perspectives other than that of the author, usually the head of the household. It is much more difficult to dig up views of family members other than the head because wives, children and servants usually do not have their own voices in family documents.¹⁴ In this context, Bokushi's "Isho" stands out because it consists of highly private notes written by a retiree who disagreed strongly with the behavior and attitudes of members of his family.

Bokushi's "Isho" confirms the view that the *ie* from the late Tokugawa period is to be primarily understood as a corporate body rather than a kinship unit.¹⁵ It does so, I argue, not by showing that the *ie* was a purpose-driven unit of people characterized by selfless devotion to the collective, but by revealing that the *ie*, like business enterprises and other types of human organization, was subject to conflict, disagreement and power struggles among members. I suggest that the overarching reason for such a complex relation between *ie* and individuals is that commoners' increasing interest in establishing the *ie* as a norm was intrinsically linked with their si-

"Kinsei jōnōsō ni okeru 'ie' to sein," in *Kinsei beisaku tansakuchitai no sonraku shakai*, edited by Watanabe Takashi (Tokyo: Iwata Shoin, 1995), 379-433, contains episodes of sons who refused to succeed to the head of family.

¹⁴ A powerful exception is an 1811 autobiographical essay by Tadano Makuzu (1763-1825), a female intellectual. See Gramlich-Oka, *Thinking Like a Man*, 17-22, 128-38.

¹⁵ See, for example, Chie Nakane, "Tokugawa Society," translated by Susan Murata, in *Tokugawa Japan*, edited by Chie Nakane and Shinzaburō Ōishi (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1990), 216-22; Susan B. Hanley, "Tokugawa Society: Material Cultures, Standard of Living, and Life-styles," in *The Cambridge History of Japan, Volume Four: Early Modern Japan*, edited by John W. Hall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 700-01; and Ōtō Osamu, "Shōkeiei, ie, kyōdōtai," 1-16.

multaneous focus on their own individual lives. The growth of interest in the two areas at the same time was often problematic when individuals had different views from each other. Bokushi's "Isho" clearly exposes the human feelings among members of an early modern Japanese family.

Bokushi, the Head of the Suzuki Family

In the trend towards establishing the 'household' as a norm, many members of the rural elite produced their own family documents, as noted above. Bokushi's own major works include "Eisei kirokushū" (Perpetual record), a family chronicle written from 1817 to 1828; "Yonabegusa" (Notes while burning the midnight oil) in 1824, a kind of autobiographical and Confucian essay to edify his descendants; and "Isho" in 1839. These three works are particularly important because they show different faces and voices of Bokushi in different stages of his life and in different contexts. "Eisei kirokushū" contains much objective information about what happened to the family year by year. "Yonabegusa", on the other hand, presents a kind of formal discourse typically accepted among the rural elite with emphasis on diligence, frugality, filial piety and the importance of the *ie* as a basic social unit. The latter two documents were produced when Bokushi was around fifty years old, in his heyday as a household head. What we can see in the texts is his pride in his family lineage and in his own achievement in business, community services and the arts, which can be summarized as follows.

The Suzuki family derived from a vassal of the Uesugi, a powerful daimyo house based in Echigo in the sixteenth century.¹⁶ However, the family was deprived of samurai status during the political turmoil after the Uesugi corps had been defeated by the Tokugawa-led forces. Bokushi's ancestor subsequently settled as a farmer in Shiozawa village in 1609.¹⁷ Then in the latter half of the eighteenth century, the farmer family was transformed into merchant landlords in the context of the development of money economy based on the booming cottage industry of weaving crepe-linen (*chijimi*) in the rural area of the province. Bokushi's parents established

the family as a well-to-do mercantile house known as the Suzukiya.¹⁸ Their main business was pawn-broking, through which the family accumulated many paddy fields, amounting to a forty-five *koku* landholding (*mochidaka*) by 1792.¹⁹

Bokushi took charge of the family business from the age of twenty and he earnestly worked to grow the family assets and status.²⁰ The family landholdings reached eighty *koku* in 1820 when he was fifty-one, and apparently reached 150 *koku* in another fifteen years,²¹ more than thirty times larger than the average in his village.²² Politically, in 1824 Bokushi was promoted to "elder" of Shiozawa by Aizu *han* authorities which had long governed the region on the Bakufu's behalf (*azukari*).²³ As was typical of status promotion among the rural elite around this period, his new political status was largely a result of his contribution of fifty *ryō* to a bond loan (*goyōkin*) to Aizu *han* in 1820.²⁴ Bokushi had also received a number of commendations from the Aizu *han* authority for his contributions to the community

¹⁸ See *ibid.*, 17; "Yonabegusa," SBZ1, 475-78.

¹⁹ "Eisei kirokushū," 27; "Yonabegusa," 476. A similar history of a rural elite family is introduced in Pratt, *Japan's Protoindustrial Elite*, 113-14.

²⁰ "Yonabegusa," 476.

²¹ A letter from Bokushi to a friend dated 1837/1/19. "Shokan," SBZ1, 971.

²² Moriyama, "Crossing Boundaries," 131.

²³ Bokushi was granted provisional status of "elder" (*toshiyori-kaku*) in 1822, and after two-year service, he received the full status of "elder." See "Eisei kirokushū," 82, 87. From 1724 the Bakufu entrusted the administration of most of the Uonuma area to Aizu *han* under the system of "trust land" (*azukarichi*), where the *han* authority took responsibility for taxation and judicial functions on behalf of the Bakufu. See Niigataken ed., *Niigata-kenshi tsūshi* (Niigata: Niigataken, 1987), vol. 3, 208-09, 274-78; vol. 4, 18-21, 24-35.

²⁴ See "Eisei kirokushū," 72, 73, 82, 87; also "Eitai kōshinchō," SBZ2, 111. For the practice of commoners' status promotion in relation to their financial contribution to their domain authorities, see, for example, Pratt, *Japan's Protoindustrial Elite*, 139-40; Fukaya Katsumi, *Edojidai no mibun ganbō: miagari to ueshita nashi* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 2006), 136-42.

¹⁶ See "Eisei kirokushū," SBZ2, 13-18.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 14-15.

welfare in the years of bad harvests.²⁵

In the area of cultural activities, Bokushi was much more active than a typical *gōnō* was. He organized large-scaled *haikai* contests in 1797 and 1800, establishing himself as a young leader in the local poetry circle. Throughout his life, he produced a great many pictures and poems, and collected a large number of artworks and letters from like-minded people from many places and from various social clusters including famous writers and artists.²⁶ His keen interest in communicating with urban literati resulted in his name appearing several times in novels and essays by Kyokutei Bakin, Santō Kyōzan and Jippensha Ikku from 1819,²⁷ and

²⁵ Bokushi produced a scroll entitled “Kikan” which contains many commendations letters from the Aizu-*han* authority. See Suzuki Bokushi kinenkan kaikan jūgo shūnen kinen kyōryoku iinkai, comp., *Shiozawamachi no shitei bunkazai ten* (Shiozawa, Niigata: Shiozawamachi bunka supōtsu jigyō shinkō kōsha, 2004), 61.

²⁶ He had 400-600 correspondents nationwide, from famous authors and kabuki actors to rural intellectuals as well as samurai officials. See Takeshi Moriyama, “Communicating Provincials: The Correspondence Network of Suzuki Bokushi (1770-1842),” *Japanese Studies*, 29:1 (May 2009): 47-63.

²⁷ Bokushi compiled collections of letters from Bakin to him and Kyōzan to him, entitled “Takizawa Bakin shokanshū,” and “Santō Kyōzan shokanshū,” which are contained in SBZ2. According to these letters, in his books Bakin acknowledged Bokushi as his friend in Echigo, someone who had sent him a variety of information and drawings of local events and natural objects since 1819. Those books include *Gendō hōgen*, vol. 1 in 1819, and *Nansō Satomi hakkenden*, vol. 7 in 1827. See “Takizawa Bakin shokanshū,” 196-99. More often than Bakin did, Kyōzan used Bokushi’s name in his books largely for the sake of promoting the *Hokuetsu seppu* project with Bokushi. See “Santō Kyōzan shokanshū,” 292, 300, 304, 313, 319, 341. Bokushi’s name also appeared in Ikku’s travel novel, *Kokkei tabigarasu*, in 1820, after Bokushi looked after him when he had travelled around Echigo in preparation for his writing. See Jippensha Ikku, *Echigo kikōshū, Volume Three: Kokkei tabigarasu* (Matsumoto: Kyōdo Shuppansha, 1996), 76-81.

eventually led him to an extraordinary achievement in publishing *Hokuetsu seppu* in Edo in 1837.

Bokushi is a clear example of very successful members of the late Tokugawa rural elite who achieved by equally promoting activities in all areas of economy, politics and the arts.²⁸ For years, Bokushi had repeatedly articulated the principles to which he cleaved: always giving absolute priority to the family business (“*keizai daiichi*”), obeying the ruler and laws (“*ue o uyamai, hatto o tsutsushimi*”), and enjoying literature and the arts to enrich his humanity but within limits so as not to affect any worldly business (“*yoryoku ni fūga mo motea-sobi*”).²⁹

With such self-pride and fondness for writing, Bokushi wanted to set up a family practice of documenting what happened to the Suzuki household. As its title shows, “Eisei kirokushū” was intended to be a ‘perpetual record’ of the activities of the Suzuki family, “whether happy, infuriating, sad or pleasant.”³⁰ Bokushi clearly states in the Foreword that this record was and should continue to be written to provide future members of the household with useful information about their ancestors’ lives. Without this kind of record, he writes, descendants would only understand their ancestors’ names from the death register roll, and would soon forget other information, or never even know the interesting stories and experiences of their ancestors. He thus presented his work as a model intended to be the beginning of a continuing Suzuki family chronicle. He instructed his successors on how to maintain this journal in everyday life, and urged other descendants to “read this book once a year.”³¹ As Anne Walthall has already suggested, Bokushi’s “Eisei kirokushū” as well as family documents produced by other *gōnō* represent the family head’s overt effort to establish a certain “house style (*kafū*).”³² For

²⁸ See, for example, Sugi Hitoshi, *Kinsei no chiiki to zaison bunka: gijutsu to shōhin to fūga no kōryū* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 2001), 36-46.

²⁹ “Yonabegusa,” 470, 478, and “Yonabegusa beppon,” SBZ1, 504. Similar expressions are all over in “Yonabegusa.”

³⁰ “Eisei kirokushū,” 13.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Anne Walthall, “The Family Ideology of the Rural Entrepreneurs in Nineteenth Century Japan,” *Journal of Social History*, vol. 23 (1990): 463.

her, this “house style” comprises “household history, its culture, and occupation” as well as “certain sets of values and standards of behavior” to be imposed on family members. Walthall is right to emphasize that family documents express “a desire on the part of their authors to develop and maintain a family tradition, to distinguish their families ..., and to perpetuate not merely the family lands and lineage, but the family customs and the house style.”³³ In reality, however, the Suzuki *ie* after Bokushi’s retirement from its headship did not necessarily run the way he desired, that “Isho” revealed.

Bokushi, a Retiree, in 1839

The domestic problems that Bokushi faced after his retirement were due to a large extent to the complexity of the Suzuki family structure. As shown in Figure 2, in 1839, Bokushi, aged seventy, had a young spouse, his sixth wife Rita, probably forty-seven years old. Bokushi’s marital life was not ordinary, although historians established that divorce and remarriage was not rare among Tokugawa commoners.³⁴ His first and second wives were divorced within a few years although they gave birth to a son, Jōtarō, and a daughter, Kuwa, respectively.³⁵ His marriage to the third wife, Uta, went very well over twenty-three years, although they didn’t have their own children. The son, Jōtarō, died

of tuberculosis at the age of twenty-one, leaving his young wife and baby daughter. So Bokushi and Uta arranged their daughter Kuwa’s marriage to Kan’emon, who was Uta’s relative.³⁶ Uta died at forty-eight, probably of dysentery. Bokushi, then fifty-two, remarried quite quickly, but his fourth wife ran away in five months; his fifth wife eloped with a former lover two months after the wedding. After facing great humiliation, Bokushi married Rita in 1823.³⁷ But the divorced fourth wife brought a two-year-old boy to Bokushi, claiming the boy was from her marriage with Bokushi. The Suzukis accepted the boy and named him Yahachi.³⁸ Accordingly, at the time when Bokushi was writing “Isho”, the head of household was Kan’emon, forty-two years old, and the main housewife (*shufu*) was Kuwa, forty-four years of age. Their son and heir was Eizaemon, twenty, who had married two years earlier. Kuwa and Kan’emon also had four other small children. Yahachi was eighteen years old, still living with Bokushi. Several years earlier, Bokushi had established a branch family for his deceased son’s daughter, Suwa.³⁹

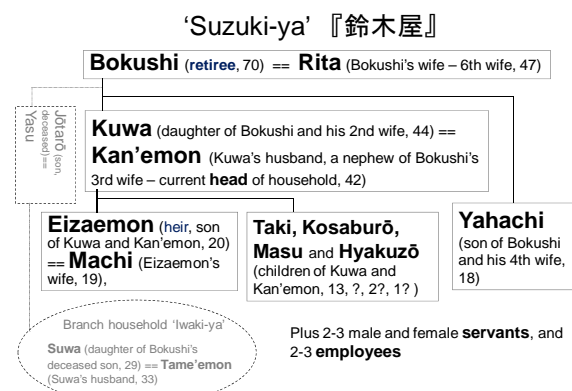


Figure 2: The Suzuki Family in 1839

In stark contrast to his reasons for writing “Eisei kirokushū” and “Yonabegusa”, the production of “Isho” was motivated by Bokushi’s unhappiness and frustration in retirement. In his mind, the roots

³³ Ibid., 478.

³⁴ Bokushi’s marital life has briefly been discussed in Anne Walthall, “The Life and Time of Suzuki Bokushi,” xxxix; “The Family Ideology of the Rural Entrepreneurs,” 469-70; and “The Life Cycle of Farm Women in Tokugawa Japan,” in *Recreating Japanese Women, 1600-1945*, edited by Gail Lee Bernstein (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 58-62. Also see Takahashi, *Hokuetsu seppu no shisō*, 173-94, and Ujiie, *Edojin no oi*, 48-56. For the issues of early modern commoners divorce and remarriage, see, for example, Thomas Smith, *Nakahara: Family Farming and Population in a Japanese Village, 1717-1830* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1977), 99-103; Hayami Akira, *Edo nōmin no kurashi to jinsei* (Tokyo: Reitaku Daigaku Shuppankai, 2002), 154-64.

³⁵ “Eisei kirokushū,” 27-31.

³⁶ Ibid., 52-53, 55-56. Also see Takahashi, *Zayū no Suzuki Bokushi*, 153.

³⁷ “Eisei kirokushū,” 78-81, 83-84.

³⁸ Ibid., 87-88.

³⁹ For this information about the family members of the Suzukiya, see *ibid.*, 44-45, 98-99.

of his unhappiness lay in a complex blend of several factors: first, his sickness and physical disability; second, his disagreement with Kan'emon over business and household management; third, individual differences between Kan'emon and him in personality and lifestyle; and fourth, a generational power struggle in the household in relation to the complex family structure. All these things contributed to Bokushi's sense of frustration at the gap between ideal and reality at the end of his life.

Sickness and physical disability naturally affect elderly people's minds and their interaction with their family. Bokushi had been a very healthy, energetic man, although he had been hard of hearing since he was young. In 1836, however, he had a stroke while he was hosting Santō Kyōzan, who had travelled to Echigo from Edo for the first time, bringing a proof copy of *Hokuetsu seppu* for Bokushi in preparation for its scheduled appearance in bookshops in Edo and Osaka in the following year. These days were really a dream come true for Bokushi until the disease finished the celebration. He narrowly escaped death after treatment in a hot spring, but the stroke left him partly paralyzed, mildly impaired of speech and harder of hearing,⁴⁰ all of which caused communication problems between Bokushi and his family. Bokushi expressed his frustration: "This old body can't say what I want to say, so I would appreciate it if you elicit what I want to say or you tell me so when you can't understand my words."⁴¹

Bokushi's disagreement with Kan'emon over business and household management was due to generational and personality difference between the two men as the household navigated the changing rural economy. It is probably correct to say that the Suzuki household, like other wealthy farmer-merchants of this time, reached a turning point in terms of economic growth. A study of the development of landlords in Echigo points to three distinct periods in the emergence of great landlords in this province: first, the 1750s-80s, in which *gōnō* grew based on commodity trade along with the development of a money economy in rural areas; second, the 1830s-50s, characterized by *gōnō*'s large scale land acquisition as a result of their money-lending

to ordinary farmers; and third, the 1870s onwards, which witnessed the further growth of landlords under the new status quo of Meiji.⁴² In reference to this timeline, Bokushi's father's headship corresponds to the first period, Bokushi's is placed between the first and the second, and Kan'emon's relates to the second. Bokushi's father was a second son so he did not inherit much property, but succeeded in commerce by marketing the local textile specialty, *Echigo chijimi*. He then changed the family business to pawn-broking and land management. From about 1790 Bokushi faithfully followed in his father's footsteps over four decades, achieving a great deal of success. He had been very cautious, conservative and meticulous in everything in business. However, coinciding with Kan'emon's succession to the headship in 1830, a highly unstable time began in terms of both economy and politics. As with many other regions, Echigo province experienced famine, riots, natural disasters and political reforms at this time.⁴³ Bokushi's description of the era, "a time without security" (*yudan naranu jisetsu*), well represents his concern about the economic and social situation of those days.⁴⁴ Yet such instability prompted the emergence of larger landlords as a result of financial problems among the population at large.⁴⁵

As the head of a *gōnō* family, Kan'emon was not only much younger than Bokushi but he was a more ambitious and bolder entrepreneur. Bokushi's intense devotion to the pawn-broking business was not continued by Kan'emon, who pursued more

⁴² Niigataken, ed., *Niigataken shi tsūshihen*, vol. 5 (Niigata: Niigataken, 1987), 163-201. Because of the existence of great landlords, Niigata prefecture was called "landlords kingdom" (*jinushi ōkoku*) in the Meiji and Taishō periods. According to a survey in 1924, the prefecture had five landlords out of the nation's nine who owned more than 1,000 *chōbu* (approx. 2500 acres) of land (Hokkaidō was excluded from the survey). Tanaka Keiichi, et al, *Niigataken no rekishi* (Tokyo: Yamakawa Shuppansha, 1998), 280.

⁴³ See, for example, Niigataken, ed., *Niigataken shi tsūshihen*, vol. 5, 17-148.

⁴⁴ "Isho," 940.

⁴⁵ For other *gōnō*'s experiences during the 1830s-40s, see, for example, Pratt, *Japan's Proto-industrial Elite*, 150-51.

⁴⁰ Bokushi's letter to a literary friend on 1837/1/19. "Shokan," 971-73.

⁴¹ "Isho," 947.

profitable lines of business, and sought higher status among rural merchants. Kan'emon paid two hundred *ryō* for a license and equipment for *sake*-brewing, and also expanded the money-lending business to a much larger scale than ever before.⁴⁶ Kan'emon wanted to discontinue the pawnshop, the management of which required meticulous attention to numerous small loans and goods to take in as pawn or to sell.⁴⁷ However, Kan'emon's active business management struck Bokushi as risky and careless.

In addition, Bokushi's conservatism and uprightness seem to have inclined him towards safer ways. "Yonabegusa" contains many episodes that display this aspect of his nature. One describes his very earnest study habits in his temple-school days. Another says he had never gambled since he lost some money in his late teenage days, and one more self-critically confesses his one and apparently only experience of visiting a brothel after being lured there by friends.⁴⁸

Such a personality exacerbated Bokushi's real concern about the vulnerability of the household, although the expression of such concern was to an extent formulaic: similar sentiments were often expressed in didactic essays and family precepts of other wealthy households in the Tokugawa period. Early examples of awareness of wealthy households' vulnerability are seen in Sagawa Masachika's *Shison kagami* (Handbook for descendants), published in 1667, and Nishikawa Joken's *Chōnin bukuro* (Words for townsmen), published in 1719. Both refer to a popular saying, "there is no second generation in millionaire families."⁴⁹ Bokushi similarly states in "Yonabegusa" that "very few house-

holds of farmers or commoners in this rural place continue to prosper for more than a hundred years."⁵⁰ Like other authors of family precepts and didactic essays, he strongly emphasizes the importance both of abstaining from "extravagant behavior and haughtiness" (*ogori*) and of putting "frugality" (*ken'yaku*) into everyday practice.⁵¹

Bokushi also follows Confucian scholars in establishing a distinction between "frugality" and "stinginess" (*rinshoku*).⁵² However, in practice, his strict observance of "frugality" in everyday house-keeping provoked tension between him and other family members. Bokushi was proud of his habit of not wasting anything, whether time, paper or pieces of rope.⁵³ For example, "Isho" records that he had collected all sorts of timber, including odds and ends, and put all of them in order. Kan'emon, however, split them for firewood. Nevertheless, Bokushi took some of them back, and used them to make many boxes, name-plates for the pawnshop, and the like.⁵⁴ Even Bokushi's last wife, Rita, sometimes could not stand such habits. She once threw away all the wooden sandals that Bokushi had repaired himself.⁵⁵ Servants and peasants who worked for the Suzukiya were, of course, sensitive to the difference between Bokushi's and Kan'emon's sense of "frugality." After retirement Bokushi learned, for example, that they praised the new head of the Su-

⁵⁰ "Yonabegusa," 438.

⁵¹ Ibid., 439, 451, 457, 467.

⁵² The difference between "frugality" and "stinginess" is emphasized in many didactic essays, including *Kadōkun* (pub. 1712) by Kaibara Ekken, and *Chōnin bukuro* by Nishikawa Joken. See Yokoyama Toshio, ed., *Kaibara Ekken: Tenchi waraku no bunmeigaku* (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1995), 265-66, and Nishikawa Joken, "Chōnin bukuro," 99. Bokushi echoes such a view in "Yonabegusa," 469.

⁵³ "Isho," 931. Bokushi's reluctance to waste any piece of any material is very similar to an instruction given in a final testament by Shimai Sōshitsu. "Shimai Sōshitsu yuigonjō," in Yamamoto, comp., *Kakunshū*, 239-40. For English translation, see J. Mark Ramseyer, "Thrift and Diligence: House Codes of Tokugawa Merchant Families," *Monumenta Nipponica*, 34:2 (1979): 211, 223.

⁵⁴ "Isho," 957-78.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 933.

⁴⁶ See "Isho," 901, 935.

⁴⁷ A *gōnō* family's shift from pawn business to large scale money-lending in the 1830s is also discussed in Pratt, *Japan's Protoindustrial Elite*, 149-50.

⁴⁸ "Yonabegusa," 441-42, 446, 471.

⁴⁹ Sagawa Masachika, "Shison kagami" and Nishikawa Joken, "Chōnin bukuro," in *Kinsei chōnin shisō*, compiled by Nakamura Yukihiro (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1975), 56, 90, 92. Commoners' incorporation of such sentiments into their family precepts is discussed by Yamamoto Shinkō in his "Edo-ki shomin kakun no kiseki," *Kikan Nihon shisōshi*, No. 51 (1997): 55-88.

zukiya for his “generous” attitude toward household economy.⁵⁶

Differences between Bokushi’s and Kan’emon’s personal attributes, economic views and generations threw into sharp relief the two men’s different behavior in daily life. Bokushi’s disapproval of Kan’emon’s everyday activities extended to many things. In family discipline, he felt that Kan’emon was slipshod at greeting others, half-hearted in ancestor worship, and did not discipline children. As for lifestyle, Bokushi chafed at Kan’emon’s habit of late rising, taking a nap and sitting at a *kotatsu*-heater; Kan’emon loved luxury, wearing good kimono, travelling on horseback or by palanquin, and purchasing folding screens. Bokushi complained that he was bad at housekeeping: he left shelves, drawers and boxes untidy, or knives and tools rusty. More importantly Bokushi felt Kan’emon had poor business habits: neglecting bookkeeping, careless handling of small change and so on.⁵⁷ Kan’emon’s shortcomings actually suggest a list of dos and don’ts for the head of a household from Bokushi’s point of view.

Generational power struggles between a retiree and the current head of family existed in many households. An 1873 testament by a *gōnō* in Shimotsuke province, for example, includes a section which advises “how to behave after retirement” (*inkyō no shikata*). The author recommended that after retirement people not reserve “retiree’s assets” (*inkyō ryō*), nor “keep any money,” but curb “personal desire” (*shiyoku*). By doing these things, he wrote, the elderly could be a “happy-go-lucky retiree” (*gokuraku inkyō*), fully looked after by the current head of the family.⁵⁸ This actually reveals the custom, in the author’s region and day at least, that retirees might have reserved part of the family assets to support their life separately. But he opposed this custom because separate finances within one household

tended to “bring the parent and child to a difficult relationship, which often ends up with mediation by relatives or the community.”⁵⁹ There is no clue as to whether or not Bokushi reserved part of the family assets for his retirement; however, it is clear that he continued to exercise his freedom in spending money on his cultural activities and communication with other literati across great distances. Letters from Santō Kyōzan to Bokushi, for example, show that Bokushi regularly sent Kyōzan season’s greetings including a New Year’s gift (*toshidama*) of one or two *shu*, and also money requesting Kyōzan buy books and prints for him.⁶⁰

It is likely that the complexity of Suzuki family structure complicated the generational power struggle between the retiree and the current head. Bokushi’s position was weakened by the death of Uta, his longstanding wife, and also by his subsequent unsuccessful remarriages. Moreover, although his marriage to Rita lasted until his death, this young spouse — more than twenty years younger than he and just a few years older than Kan’emon and Kuwa — could hardly maintain Uta’s position of domestic power. For Kan’emon, Uta was not only his mother-in-law but also his own relative, who had probably initiated the connection between him and the Suzukis in the first place.⁶¹ Bokushi writes that “especially since Uta died, [Kan’emon] has treated me as a nuisance, and he also has become foppish. ... I have been the only one who bars his path.”⁶²

⁵⁶ Ibid., 940.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 908-09, 917-19, 923-24, 956. These points are discussed in Takahashi, “Isho ni miru bannen no Bokushi zō,” 133-37; Ujiie, *Edojin no oi*, 41-46.

⁵⁸ Tamura Yoshishige, “Yoshishige ikun,” in *Nihon nōsho zenshū*, Volume 21, compiled by Kumashiro Yukio, Nagakura Tamotsu, Inaba Mitsukuni and Izumi Masahiro (Tokyo: Nōsangyoson Bunka Kyōkai, 1981), 229-30.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 231-32.

⁶⁰ “Santō Kyōzan shokanshū,” 305, 343. (One *shu*, a sixteenth *ryō*, was worth around 400 *mon* in those days.) Only after Bokushi paid five *ryō* to Kyōzan for his editing work for Bokushi’s draft of *Hokuetsu seppu*, a letter from Kyōzan mentioned Kan’emon’s name, suggesting that the payment of this substantial sum was made under the name of the current head not the retiree. Ibid., 317-18.

⁶¹ See Takahashi, *Zayū no Suzuki Bokushi*, 153. Married women’s active involvement in their natal family affairs is seen in case of Matsuo Taseko, among others (Walthall, *The Weak Body of a Useless Woman*, 64).

⁶² “Isho,” 937.

Domestic Quarrels

Recent studies such as those by Ōtō Osamu reveal many kinds of problems between family members: parents vs. children, husbands vs. wives, and so on.⁶³ Bokushi's "Isho" is not merely testimony to the existence of such problems but also an important text in showing actual scenes of domestic quarrels in the Tokugawa period. One example is an 1836 incident that Bokushi wrote about bitterly.⁶⁴ The quarrel started with an exchange of words between Bokushi and Kan'emon about work habits. When Kan'emon said "I *am* working!," Bokushi answered sarcastically, "Yes, work is work however small or big, isn't it?" These words infuriated Kan'emon, who then went upstairs, abusing Bokushi violently. Kan'emon dragged Bokushi's painting tools down from the retiree's room, shouting, "From now on, I'll be a retiree. *You*, be the head of the household. Do whatever you like!" Kan'emon also smacked his son's head in a temper, telling him not to learn painting any more from Bokushi. Having seen his son-in-law raging so violently, Bokushi apologized repeatedly, but Kan'emon's yelling did not stop until the head of their stem family came to intervene.

This domestic dispute continued that night. While having dinner, Kan'emon announced, "I have decided to appeal to the Office (*oyakusho*) [of Aizu *han*]." Bokushi did not reply, thinking it was just Kan'emon's usual big talk. After midnight, however, the family realized that Kan'emon truly had gone out. Bokushi and other members of the family searched for Kan'emon, "asking at house after house all over the town." Bokushi describes that night search as a "once-in-a-lifetime humiliation." Finally, Kan'emon returned home, accompanied by Bokushi's nephew from a neighboring town. Bokushi "just coaxed [Kan'emon] into settling down," according to "Isho."

This incident seems to have been a turning-point in the domestic feud between the father and son-in-

law. Their antagonism towards each other intensified. Bokushi writes:

I have been on good terms with my family, relatives and all other people throughout my entire life. Not to mention the fact that my parents and sisters all praised me until they died. But this [relationship with Kan'emon] is due to evil destiny from a previous life. It can't be remedied by human will.⁶⁵

Thereafter, Kan'emon no longer hesitated to reject Bokushi's advice on household matters. Bokushi angrily recorded Kan'emon's words: "My mind and yours are as different as black and white," and, "When you appear and get involved in something, it always obstructs our family business."⁶⁶

This particular dispute highlights the complex social frameworks that surrounded the notion of the *ie* in Bokushi's day. Firstly, from a legal point of view, Bokushi was not necessarily in a weak position even after retirement. As noted in Ōtō's study of parent-child disputes in the Tokugawa period, the Confucianist Bakufu law gave clear superiority to parents over their children. Parents could sue their children or renounce them; but a child's lawsuit over a parent's action was itself a crime against filial piety. Only if a child had suffered through "injustice" perpetrated by a parent was he or she allowed to submit a request for special consideration.⁶⁷ Bokushi did not, of course, commit any "injustice" in this sense. On the contrary, he had every reason to be respected by others because of his economic success and community contributions. Bokushi was also in a much stronger position than Kan'emon in terms of biological relation to the Suzuki bloodline. A popular textbook for commoners, *Hyakushō bunryōki* (The farmers' role, pub. 1726), acknowledges potential difficulty in living with a son-in-law as compared to living with a daughter-in-law, and advises "not to hesitate to kick out [the son-in-law] if your initial expectation of him turns out to be wrong."⁶⁸

⁶³ See Ōtō Osamu, "Fūfugenka, rikon to sonraku shakai," 177-206; Ōtō Osamu, *Kinsei nōmin to ie, mura, kokka* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1996), esp. chapter 3 "Kinsei kōki no oyakokan funsō to sonraku shakai," 399-430.

⁶⁴ "Isho," 916, 950-51.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 946.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 887, 889, 924.

⁶⁷ Ōtō, *Kinsei nōmin no ie, mura, kokka*, 409.

⁶⁸ Tokiwa Tanhoku, "Hyakushō bunryōki," in Nakamura, comp., *Kinsei chōnin shisō*, 262.

Despite this strong legal and social position, however, Bokushi gave in to Kan'emon. His surrender probably reflected his sense of vulnerability due to increasing signs of aging – illness and disabilities – and because of his weakened power in the family after Uta's death. Further, Bokushi feared possible forcible intervention by relatives or the community to remove a troublesome retiree. Ōtō's study describes several cases of this kind of intervention, showing that Tokugawa village communities had power to retire trouble-making heads of families, or even to confine them to separate rooms or cottages (*oshikome*). This was because, Ōtō explains, village communities often decided to give priority to the continuity of an individual household as a corporate member of their village, even if it meant overriding the Bakufu moral code emphasizing filial piety. In practice, interventions by village elders, relatives or neighbors in intergenerational disputes tended to be aimed at retiring the parents rather than advising parents to renounce sons or reject sons-in-law.⁶⁹

Bokushi's "Isho" gives voice to real fear of such community intervention in his disputes with his son-in-law. He writes, for example, that "I can now see [Kan'emon's] intention to organize a meeting of the relatives in order to kick me out to a retiree's cottage."⁷⁰ He mentions the threat of being "kicked out" (*oidashi*) or "turned out" (*tsukamidashi*) by Kan'emon, or of becoming "a retiree in confinement" (*oshikome inkyo*).⁷¹ Bokushi's relatives were also worried about the possibility of such a worsening of Bokushi and Kan'emon's confrontation. The head of the Suzuki stem family particularly suggested to Bokushi that he should pre-empt such a fate by coming to live with them or with Bokushi's granddaughter Suwa instead.⁷² Bokushi, however, refused to move out of the house for the following reasons: first, he believed he had done nothing

wrong; second, he was strongly attached to the house that he had built at the expense of a great deal of effort and money; and third, he could not stand the embarrassment of being removed from home, which would inevitably have attracted a good deal of public attention.⁷³

Community perception was undoubtedly a very important influence on Bokushi. The domestic disputes of the Suzuki family became a subject of gossip in the community after relatives became involved and neighbors heard violent shouting and children crying. Apparently Bokushi, rather than Kan'emon, felt deeply regretful about the spread of gossip, as he was then, on the one hand, very conscious of his fame as a man of high caliber in business and the arts, and on the other hand, still worried about the ill-repute occasioned by his marriage breakdowns. In fact, he was even told by Kan'emon, "You'd better not do anything more because you have built your reputation as high as it can get."⁷⁴ In this respect, the possibility that Kan'emon would appeal to the Aizu-*han* administration must have been Bokushi's greatest concern. It is actually uncertain whether Kan'emon really intended to bring a lawsuit or simply said so in an effort to intimidate Bokushi. Nonetheless, the possibility of a lawsuit must surely have had a great impact on Bokushi, who generally was careful to respect the status quo. He was proud of his numerous official commendations, and very conscious of never having been involved in any lawsuits so far.⁷⁵ For him, Kan'emon's midnight disappearance after the quarrel, possibly to launch a lawsuit, "overwhelmed [his] body and soul" with concern about "losing face with the ruler" (*okami*).⁷⁶

Bokushi's Frame of Mind and Action

The text of "Isho" embodies Bokushi's desperate negotiation with the fact that his household was changing under his successor's headship. Bokushi was a sick old retiree full of resentment about the growing gap between what he wished to happen and the reality of life in his household. The manner of

⁶⁹ Ōtō, *Kinsei nōmin no ie, mura, kokka*, 406-13.

⁷⁰ "Isho," 927.

⁷¹ Ibid., 889, 916, 927, 953, 959. Kasaya Kazuhiko's studies first revealed many cases of forcible action by a daimyo's senior vassals to hold their lord in confinement for the sake of the daimyo house. See Kasaya Kazuhiko, *Shukun oshikome no kōzō: Kinsei daimyō to kashindan* (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 2006, originally published in 1988).

⁷² "Isho," 927.

⁷³ Ibid., 927, 930-31.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 892.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 916.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 904.

dying represented another gap. What Bokushi wished for was probably to die in the way his father had shown him three decades earlier.

According to Bokushi's texts, his father Kōemon died peacefully aged seventy-one in 1807. Kōemon had been reasonably sound until a few weeks before his death, although a stroke had prevented him from taking long walks for a year or so. When he became ill, he said to the family "now it's time for the finale of my life" (*waga inochi no shin'uchi*). So people like his daughters who had married into families in neighboring towns came and looked after him by turns for a while.⁷⁷ At the final exchange of words between Bokushi and Kōemon, Bokushi said "Please tell us anything you wish for. I will make it happen after you go to heaven." Kōemon replied, "I had this son, therefore I have no further wish in this world."⁷⁸ Bokushi then in tears asked Kōemon for his death poem (*jisei*; Kōemon had also been a keen poet well known in regional *haikai* circles).⁷⁹ Bokushi later recorded his father's last *haikai* in several documents for his descendants:

<i>Kari no yo no</i>	A little cuckoo
	[woke me up],
<i>yume mata oboezu</i>	I cannot remember
	my dream again,
<i>Hototogisu</i>	a dream in this tran-
	sient world.

Bokushi arranged a large funeral for Kōemon, attended by around 230 people. According to Bokushi, two and a half *ryō* 1750 *mon* were paid to the priests and their assistants, in addition to his donation of ten *ryō* to the family temple.⁸⁰

Bokushi's respect and care for his father's soul continued long after. In 1821, fourteen years after Kōemon's death, Bokushi compiled two books of poetry which he offered for the repose of his father's soul: first, a collection of verses by eighty-seven poets, both from the region and far away; and, second, a selection of Kōemon's poetry, containing around 1,400 verses, all fair-copied by Bokushi over

125 pages.⁸¹ In the preface to the latter book, Bokushi wrote a brief account of his father's life as follows:

My father was a great man who had revitalized (*chūkō*) the household economy and spirit. When he was young, his business talent stood out. Nothing he did failed to make profits. From thirty years of age, he exclusively devoted himself to the family business. Only when he had spare time did he learn poetry and art (*fūga*). ... From [his fifties], he just enjoyed himself in the arts, communicating with various people near and far, urban and rural. ... Here I have compiled this book, hoping that someday we can print it (*azusa ni kizami*) and send copies to like-minded friends in the cities and the provinces.⁸²

These sections of "Isho" and "Yonabegusa" provide fine examples of the happy end of a person's life in an early modern context. Bokushi obviously wished that his son-in-law and other family members would treat him as he had treated his own father. It is likely that Bokushi believed that he had even stronger reasons than his father to be respected as an ancestor, one descendant could be proud of, admired for his knowledge and talent in the arts, and appreciated because of the household assets built under his headship. Yet, what the sick and old Bokushi detected from the behavior and words of Kan'emon and other family members was only their propensity to wish for Bokushi's early death. He wrote, "I suspect the whole family now wishes that I was going to die tomorrow if not today."⁸³

However, Bokushi did not quietly accept the situation. He wrote as a measure to negotiate the troubled relationship with his son-in-law. In fact, "Isho" was not his first attempt. A few years before it, Bokushi wrote a letter criticizing Kan'emon's household management and treatment of Bokushi, pointing out "dozens of items amounting to fourteen

⁷⁷ "Eisei kirokushū," 41.

⁷⁸ "Yonabegusa," 461-62. Also see "Isho," 901.

⁷⁹ In Bokushi's introduction to "Shūgetsuan hokkushū," SBZ2, 125.

⁸⁰ "Eisei kirokushū," 41-42.

⁸¹ See "Shūgetsuan hokkushū," 125-83; "Shūgetsuan rōkissen Bokusui tsuizen shū," SBZ2, 187-90.

⁸² "Shūgetsuan hokkushū," 125.

⁸³ "Isho," 958. Similar comments are also noted 894, 899.

or fifteen pages.” The letter was sent to a relative’s house while Kan’emon was staying there, and was addressed to Kan’emon as well as to the head of the relative’s family as a witness and mediator. Bokushi even required Kan’emon to answer in writing. In practice, however, Kan’emon simply ignored Bokushi. He offered no written reply, but verbally criticized Bokushi for exaggerating family problems by his actions.⁸⁴ In fact, Kan’emon also (to a far lesser extent) used the power of documents in attempts to settle the repeated confrontations with his father-in-law. According to “Isho”, in a quarrel before Bokushi’s stroke, Kan’emon demanded and received Bokushi’s promise in writing that Bokushi would no longer interfere with Kan’emon’s headship of the family business.⁸⁵

Bokushi wrote “Isho” as a last resort in his troublesome communication with Kan’emon, an effort filled with much resentment and feelings of resignation. Bokushi wrote that “there is no chance for me to fight against you in this world, but I hope this ‘Isho’ speaks to you clearly.”⁸⁶ Bokushi’s tactics were also noteworthy. “Isho” was addressed to Kan’emon and three families of relatives. Bokushi stated that “Isho” should be kept not in the Suzukiya but in a relative’s house.⁸⁷ He also wrote:

If you kindly have a look at this will once a year after my death, it would please my soul much more than thousands chants would do. My soul will rest in peace. Please never ever show the will to anyone other than the addressees. If you dispose of this, my soul deep in the grave will bear a grudge against you forever and without fail.⁸⁸

“Isho” represents the strong ego of Bokushi; however, it also contains Bokushi’s final hopes for his reconciliation with Kan’emon. For example, in the middle of “Isho” he wrote, “I should apologize that I have been picking up all the bad points of [Kan’emon] but not mentioning any good points.” Bokushi then wrote about Kan’emon’s courageous

intervention in certain peasant meetings which otherwise might have developed into a riot, saying “I was really relieved and proud of you then. In heaven, I’ll be looking forward to seeing you serving the community even more.”⁸⁹ In another place, while writing a series of criticisms of Kan’emon, Bokushi abruptly inserted words of appreciation about Kan’emon’s kindness in buying bags of flour to cook *udon*-noodles for Bokushi. “[Flour] is as expensive as one *ryō* per *hyō*, but you bought it for me more than twice because I love *udon* ... You did not allow any other people to use [the flour],” Bokushi wrote. He continued “I should not forget that you gave me such a treat (*kōyō*) too.”⁹⁰ After this sentence, however, Bokushi returned to his criticism of Kan’emon’s household management. Bokushi clearly expressed an unstable mix of indignation at Kan’emon’s deeds and regret about his focus solely on the negative side of his successor’s business and personality.

Perhaps Bokushi’s composition of “Isho” even worsened his relationship with Kan’emon in the end. Although the details are unknown, it is believed that Bokushi finally moved, at least temporarily, from the Suzukiya to the Iwakiya to live with his granddaughter Suwa and her husband.⁹¹ Bokushi lived for another two years after producing “Isho.” Despite his sickness and troublesome situation, he managed to work together with Kyōzan in Edo in writing *Hokuetsu seppu* Part II. In his very last letter to a friend in 1842, Bokushi said that he had just received from the publisher the first two fascicles of Part II, and that authorship of the remaining third and fourth fascicles were underway. He was very proud of the publication, considering it “a last flourish” of his life (*shinibana*).⁹² Bokushi’s worries and criticism notwithstanding, Kan’emon proved to be a talented businessman, bringing further prosperity to the Suzuki household. The Suzukiya became known as a leading *sake*-brewer and landlord in the region in the Meiji period.⁹³ Bokushi died on 1842/5/15.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 897.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 924.

⁹¹ Takahashi, “Isho ni miru bannen no Bokushi zō,” 128.

⁹² A letter from Bokushi to a friend dated 1842/4/17. “Shokan,” 981.

⁹³ A tax document in 1876 shows that the Suzukiya was the highest payer of tax on *sake*-

⁸⁴ Ibid., 956.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 916.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 889.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 960-61.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 960.

The details of his death are unknown. Still, his posthumous name in Buddhist tradition may give us a hint how his life was perceived in the end by people close to him, particularly by the priest of his family temple. It reads “*Konyo shigō seion koji*,” literally meaning “a man with gold, honor, strong will, gentle personality.”⁹⁴



Figure 3: The grave of Bokushi and the Suzuki family, Chōonji temple, Shiozawa, Niigata. Author's photograph, October 2000.

His “Isho” survived, thanks to his “strong will,” owing particularly to two of the instructions Bokushi gave to his descendants. One was his clear demand not to dispose of the document, and the other was his instruction that “Isho” should be held not in the Suzukiya but either by the stem family or the branch family, the Iwakiya. As a result, “Isho” was privately kept in the Iwakiya for about 130 years

brewing among fifty brewers in the district. The family also grew further as a great landlord. According to surveys of land owned by large landholders in 1892 and 1909, the Suzuki family ranked sixth and tenth, respectively, in Minami Uonuma County. In Shiozawa Village, the family was first in 1892 and second in 1909. Shiozawamachi, ed., *Shiozawachō shi shiryōhen*, vol. 2 (Shiozawa, Niigata: Shiozawamachi, 2000), 443-44, 470-73.

⁹⁴ In Chinese characters, 金誉志剛性温居士. “Nenpu,” SBZ2, 443.

until a local biographer of Bokushi, Takahashi Minoru, came to read it in 1968. “Isho” first appeared in print in the 1983 publication of *Suzuki Bokushi zenshū* compiled by Takahashi and two other local historians. However, in the middle of the publishing project the compilers of the books faced severe opposition to their plan to include “Isho” in the publication from Bokushi’s great-great-grandson, then the head of the Suzukiya, who did not want his great ancestor’s honor damaged.⁹⁵ The complaint caused some disruption and delay in the project but ultimately did not override the plan because after all, as Bokushi had instructed, “Isho” had been kept away from the Suzuki household.

Conclusion

Bokushi’s “Isho” brings to light the troubled family life of this rural elite commoner, notwithstanding his eager participation in promotion of the norms of the *ie* which centered on pride in the family lineage and established status in the community and the importance of continued devotion to the family business. Bokushi’s values and lifestyle were not always accepted by other members of the household. People acted differently due to their personal attributes, their relationships and the things that happened to them. “Isho” shows such the dynamics of an early modern family, testifying to the existence of different views and emotional tensions among members.

“Isho” clearly embodies Bokushi’s simultaneous interest in both the *ie* and the ‘self.’ For Bokushi, the *ie* was not necessarily what he had to sacrifice himself for, nor was it a collective that completely subjugated his desire. It was rather an arena within which he could craft his identity by playing certain roles given to him. While in his previous role as family head his dual focus on *ie* and self worked well or at least was manageable, it became problematic in his later role as a retiree. For the sake of the *ie* it would have been better if Bokushi had just quietly played the standard role of the retiree, but this proved impossible in view of his large ego. Unfortunately his insistence on engaging fully in family activities and decisions no longer suited the household interest under Kan’emon’s headship. The

⁹⁵ See Takahashi Minoru, “Satsuki no hana,” *Hoppō bungaku*, No. 33 (1984): 33-37.

two men had different views in many areas even though both aimed at the further growth of the household economically and in social status.

The complexity of the psychology of a retiree is also exhibited in “Isho.” Bokushi wished to establish himself as a great ancestor in the history of the Suzuki family. His autobiographical essay and family chronicle were earlier endeavors when he was a confident and proud head of the family. Unlike the previous works, however, “Isho” was produced out of his frustration at his isolation in the family, and out of his desperation to regain people’s respect. Due to his pride and self-belief on the one hand, and to illness and community perception on the other, his mind wavered over whether to keep fighting against or to surrender to current circumstances of the household and his own situation.

“Isho” probably represents to some extent a typical mentality of a former household head at the end of his life in the context of the changing society of early nineteenth-century Japan. Or more generally, Bokushi’s emotions can be regarded as a classic example of human feelings when people get old, sick and frustrated with new developments. But while there may have been many unhappy retirees, the great majority of them did not leave traces of their voices in documents. Even if more of them than we realize did so, their comments in wills, letters or diaries have not survived in most cases. The production and survival of Bokushi’s “Isho” is the result of special circumstances. Bokushi’s domestic problems were probably greater than usual. His considerable intellectual and physical abilities also contributed to his decision to produce a written document: he was very capable in writing but disabled in terms of speaking. Moreover, as “Isho” itself proves, there had developed a custom at least among educated people that documents were exchanged not only between households but also now between family members, with the aim of forestalling future or further domestic problems. The compiling of written materials as a means to settle domestic disputes can be regarded as a result of the spreading practice of documentation in Tokugawa society. Finally, Bokushi’s large ego helped preserve the document, since he desired to perpetuate his ‘house style’ as part of his expression of ‘self.’

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